How Philanthropy Support Organizations

Understand & Advance
Community Power Building

tccGROUP

solutions for social impact

Authors' Note

The research for this report was conducted in Fall 2019 and finalized in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in early Spring, 2020. As our project timeline preceded global protests which began in late May in response to the killings of unarmed Black men, women, and trans people by the police, observations that are specific to these protests are noticeably absent here. Nevertheless, this report captures and reflects issues at the heart of today's widespread resistance — that is, the central role that low-income communities and communities of color can and must have in achieving equity and justice. Recognizing that achieving systemic change requires diverse partnerships and sustained resources, this report also directly addresses the role that philanthropy can and must play in supporting community power building to advance racial justice and equity.

Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Melinda Fine, Ed.D., Director of Philanthropy and Strategic Partnerships at TCC Group, believes that foundations have an important role to play in collaborating with communities and each other to tackle structural inequity and systemic challenges. A frequent speaker and author, Melinda has guided donors and foundations of all shapes and sizes for over three decades in developing strategy, enhancing funder learning and collaboration, and building institutional and movement capacity for transformational change.

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About TCC Group

For more than 40 years, TCC Group has partnered with foundations, nonprofits, and companies to tackle complex social problems through strategy, collaboration, and insightful evaluation. At TCC Group, we work to foster sustainable social change.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) shifted its longstanding approach to improving the health and well-being of all in America. The Foundation committed to building a "Culture of Health" through which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to achieve optimal health. This shift entailed embracing a focus on health equity and accordingly, to pursuing "strategies and partnerships to improve health and well-being far beyond the walls of the doctor's office." Among other things, RWJF's elevated attention to equity necessitated the Foundation's heightened consideration of how related social and economic determinants (such as access to quality education, housing, and fair employment) support or obstruct the achievement of health and well-being. Adopting a structural and systemic lens also entailed RWJF more deeply and expansively investigating how societal change takes place and is sustained in communities impacted by the greatest disparities in health and well-being.

RWJF has long supported a range of strategies through its work to address tobacco addiction, childhood obesity, opioids, and many other health challenges. Favored strategies have most often included policy, research, advocacy, and narrative change. In complement but exploratorily, RWJF has supported grassroots organizing (or "base building") led by organizations and networks in low-income communities and communities of color. RWJF's heightened attention to the factors that enhance or impede equity catalyzed a new, concentrated focus on the role communities themselves play in building power to realize the conditions essential to achieving healthy communities and transformational change.

RWJF has sought to learn from communities as well as their funders to better understand the role of community power building in supporting healthy communities. An initial commissioned study explored how diverse foundations define "power" and apply it to their work ("Philanthropy Scan:" How Funders View and Apply Power to their Work," Grassroots Solutions, Fall, 2018). In complement, this report, prepared for the Foundation by TCC Group, a mission-driven consulting firm with expertise in foundation strategy and equity change, explores how the philanthropic sector's array of Philanthropy Support Organizations (PSOs) understand community power building and support their foundation members in advancing it.

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Appreciative of RWJF's longstanding, multifaceted strategic approach, TCC Group's strategic inquiry envelopes intersecting and mutually reinforcing strategies underneath the community power building banner, encompassing an array of approaches (for example, neighborhood outreach, member education and leadership development, community-led research and publication, member leaders driving organizational decisions, training members to lead campaigns, coalition building, policy advocacy, etc.) as interacting dimensions of what it takes to build power.

Definitions of Power

Building Movement Project

"The authority or force to determine an outcome. A power dynamic is the pattern of who or what (an individual, a corporation, a government entity, a funding source, etc.) wields power in a particular context. This pattern is often 'invisible' or unspoken."[1]

Grassroots Solutions

"The force that creates change and the ability to influence others. That 'force' can stem from collective action and through organized resources."[2]

National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

"Supporting systemic change by funding civic engagement and community organizing among marginalized communities."[3]

[1] Social Service and Social Change: Process Guide, Building Movement Project, 2006, p. 46.

[2] "Philanthropy Scan: How Funders View and Apply Power to their Work," Grassroots Solutions, Fall 2018, p. 6.

[3] Power Moves Toolkit, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, May 2018.

Why Philanthropy Support Organizations:
Inquiry Purpose and Methods

Created and supported by individual foundations, the philanthropic sector encompasses several hundred **Philanthropy Support Organizations (PSOs)**. PSOs provide critical value to their tens of thousands of funder members, possessing both networks and infrastructure to convene interested parties, gather and disseminate knowledge, facilitate aligned grantmaking, coordinate with others to leverage peer expertise, and provide access to voices on the ground.

Reflecting differences in organizational focus, structure, governance, leadership voice, and field functions, PSOs collectively provide a vantage point for funders to address diverse issues (with funders focused on health, for example, convening through Grantmakers In Health), populations (e.g. Funders for LGBTQ Issues), practices (e.g. Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing), and geographies (e.g. Philanthropy Northwest).

As frontline partners for grantmakers, PSOs also function as close observers of trends across the philanthropic sector. They are often the first call for funders with questions outside of their immediate expertise or seeking to respond to unanticipated challenges, whether these are localized and/or issue-specific concerns, natural disasters, or national political change. Oftentimes, PSOs enable funders to be responsive and timely in ways that may differ markedly from their institutionalized approaches to grantmaking.

Finally, and particularly relevant for this report's inquiry, most PSOs are "big tents" by design. Their members not uncommonly reflect a range of social and political viewpoints. They may consequently interpret challenges and opportunities differently from one another, pursue different strategic approaches, and evince different levels of comfort with their institutional leadership voice.

Accordingly, findings about how PSOs as a collective body understand and support community power building may provide an instructive lens through which to consider how to productively learn from and manage strategic differences among portfolios, staff, and/ or leadership within a given foundation, enabling a foundation's eventual adoption of a robust theory of change that gives community power building a more central place within the strategic ecosystem vital to achieving equity and transformational change.

With a focus on eliciting perspectives from PSO leadership, TCC Group identified four overarching arenas of inquiry:

Framing

To what extent and in what ways are Philanthropy Support Organizations defining and/or utilizing a "community power building" frame? Are there complementary frames or conceptual lenses PSOs and their members are also adopting to ensure equitable and just opportunities for all?

Learning

Through what mechanisms, venues, and tools do Philanthropy Support Organizations support their member foundations in advancing community power building work? What are the perceived strengths and shortcomings of available resources?

Action

What factors encourage or constrain PSO funder members to advance community power building? Do these factors differ by place, constituency, and/or issue focus? What do PSOs see as most promising approaches across these and other variables?

Needs

What do PSOs as a whole, and their institutional members more specifically, need to effectively engage and build power within communities most impacted by inequity to achieve optimal health and well-being?

To explore these questions, TCC Group interviewed executive and/or program leaders of seventeen PSOs, encompassing a broad range of constituency, issue, strategy, and place-based priorities.[4]

TCC also conducted desk research on 26 PSO websites and reviewed 143 power building resources and tools (encompassing a broad definition of "power building"). In complement, TCC also interviewed RWJF program and leadership staff, exploring their understanding of the value and role of community power building as well as their perceptions of opportunities and constraints RWJF faces in embracing this strategy more fully. Finally, TCC Group participated in RWJF's November 2019 Community Power for Health Equity Symposium in Princeton, New Jersey.

About this Report

Analysis of the diverse and rich data streams here noted led to the articulation of four core findings captured in this report. Characteristics at times reflect the formal position of a given PSO and at others reflect the varied perspectives of its members; these distinctions are noted where relevant. The report's Concluding Observations share TCC Group's analysis of the state of available field learning inputs and their implications for the philanthropic sector, as diverse foundations strive to integrate a community power building approach within their work to advance equity and transformational change. Our Appendices provide detail on philanthropic experts interviewed for this report as well as a repository of relevant resources and tools that readers may find instructive.

[4] In some cases, PSO executive leadership has changed since interviews were conducted; these shifts are noted where relevant.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1:

Philanthropy Support Organizations see community power building growing in importance among their foundation members. Across regions, issues, and core constituency focus, foundations are increasingly embracing a power building mindset.

Appreciating the Centrality of Communities

PSO leaders report that foundations increasingly recognize that achieving and sustaining change, particularly within marginalized communities, cannot be accomplished without the deep and meaningful engagement of communities themselves. Admittedly, adoption of this perspective remains uneven both within and across institutions, and gaps between theory and practice may be the norm more than the exception. Nevertheless, a wide spectrum of PSO leaders believe that their foundation members increasingly recognize that building community power is vital to achieving foundation impact. For many, it follows that foundations must listen to, learn from, and partner with communities most impacted by inequity. Some accordingly pursue changes in grantmaking and/or operational practice: providing grants or capacity supports to base-building groups, right-sizing proposal and reporting requirements, adopting new assessment approaches, developing reciprocal communication and engagement vehicles, and more.

Reflecting the sector's growing recognition of the centrality of communities, Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) former President Dennis Quirin, now Executive Director of the Raikes Foundation, notes, "Putting people at the center has long been the focus of funders within NFG. But NFG's membership base has been growing to include funders addressing areas as dispersed as health, the environment, and the arts. They're coming together now because they're interested in having conversations about community-centered strategies."

Ben Maulbeck, former President of Funders for LGBTQ Issues, notes a similar trend. "In nearly every case, the shift in our funder members embracing a power building frame comes from their desire to reach and work with marginalized groups. This leads our funders to understand that if they're working with very vulnerable communities, whether low-income, people of color, trans, or any other vulnerable group, it's just not possible to achieve gains and advance justice through an advocacy campaign or a service delivery strategy alone. They quickly realize that there are amazing people out there doing amazing things, and they need support."

> ❝ If we really want to think about long-term change, we have to invest in community power building. ❞
>
> — Faith Mitchell, Former President & CEO, Grantmakers In Health (GIH)

Finally, Patricia Smith, President and CEO of The Funders' Network, notes, "Place-based funding is a critical opening to talk about community power building. Philanthropy is grappling with what it means to get to

the root causes of inequality, but that can't be addressed without tackling the question of authenticity and community voice."

Grappling with Equity and Power

PSOs note that advancing community power building is inextricably linked to advancing equity for many of their members; some foundations frame this in terms of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) more specifically. "It's about access, opportunity, and legitimacy for all types of people," explains NFG's former President Quirin. "It isn't the concentration of power that creates equity and opportunity; it's the democratization of power. What is at the center of this worldview is the belief that you can't get the right policies and laws until there is more equal power distributed across communities."

For some foundations, advancing equity equates with focusing attention explicitly and/or exclusively on marginalized people of color. PSOs with funder members that hold this perspective argue that racial equity achievement requires structural change and systemic solutions that advance justice. These foundations (and the PSOs that serve them) see marginalized communities as their greatest resource. Direct service and policy change strategies are recognized as an essential component of a

❝ We encourage our funder members to think about how they hold power and what roles they can play with it. We also encourage them to think about how to align power with a verb: building, bridging, supporting, transforming. ❞

— Carly Hare, CHANGE Philanthropy

strategic ecosystem, but as insufficient on their own. Achieving racial equity demands the active power and participation of people of color in communities that are failing to meet their priorities and needs. Supporting base-building, grassroots work, and

leadership development is accordingly seen as essential, and sometimes primary. Furthermore, engaging communities in funders' own grantmaking processes is championed as a promising practice — albeit pursued by a minority of funders as yet.

In a sector often critiqued for its shifting priorities, some PSO executives note that achieving the ambitious goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion will require foundations to embrace more ambitious — and consequently, more sustained — commitments in turn. "Racial equity is the new black — it's 'trendy' or 'fashionable,' for now," observes Edward Jones, VP of Programs at Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE). "We don't know how long it will be in vogue. Working towards a more racially equitable society should never fall out of fashion or interest for this field or society as a whole."

The DEI "trend" notwithstanding, it is important to note that many PSO members pursue equity without explicitly framing *racial* equity as their core or exclusive objective. PSOs whose members reflect a broad range of social and political perspectives (often but not exclusively regional associations, for example) may be less inclined to define equity through a race-conscious lens. Some refrain from race explicitness to side-step anticipated push back — often from boards — about perceptions of "leaning Left." Still others adopt broader language to encompass additional populations and equity concerns. Funders in rural areas with significant poverty, for example, may choose to focus on challenges faced by their predominantly white, low-income populations, rather than on other dimensions of marginalization. Still other foundations wrestle with how to call out the challenge of racial injustice while simultaneously embracing additional dimensions of marginalization relevant to their work (such as gender and sexual identity, or disability status). Working within institutions and a sector that frequently "silos" dimensions of difference into discrete portfolio areas, foundations commonly have an easier time embracing the value of "intersectionality" than in pursuing intersectional work.

However animated and articulated, PSOs observe, foundations across the sector increasingly intertwine

equity priorities with the mandate to build power within and among communities themselves.

Safeguarding Democracy in Turbulent Times

The rapidly evolving political environment that has unfolded since the 2016 presidential election presents a third factor compelling foundations to embrace a power building mindset. In many instances, PSOs have been critical to diverse funders' responsiveness in these tumultuous times, playing an important role in funder learning, networking, dialogue, and action, and enabling collective response to threatened norms in an increasingly divisive climate.[5] Southeastern Council of Foundations President & CEO Janine Lee comments, "The questions I asked that stimulated my board to begin conversations about power and equity are: What do we stand for? What are we willing to fight for? Are we willing to sit idly by while all this hate and polarization is happening in America and in the American South?" Most commonly, PSOs are using the language of "civic engagement" to broadly characterize this nexus of work. PSOs note their foundation members' increased interest in a range of (c)(3) activities, such as building alliances and coalitions, advocacy and policy, leadership development, and voter education, registration, and engagement. A smaller number have turned to public charity intermediaries and collaborative funds to more robustly engage in (c)(4) strategies. Still others have ramped up their support to grassroots organizing groups, whether through directly granting institutional dollars, or through joining donor collaboratives which (among their other assets) are perceived to minimize a foundation's "risk" when investing in "edgy" strategies, through providing safety in numbers. Taken together, these approaches constitute a strategic ecosystem for community power building work.

The following diagram, developed by the **Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC Dornsife**, locates community power building at the center of a strategic ecosystem to be resourced and leveraged.

CAPACITIES FOR CHANGE

Organizing and base-building:

Are **central** for historically excluded populations to have power, agency, and voice

Yet alone are **insufficient** to gain influence over decision-makers

Thus require an **ecosystem** of capacities tailored to achieve an inclusive democracy and to close health equity gaps

Advocacy and Policy

Research and Legal

Organizational Development, Infrastructure, and Funders

Organizing and Base-Building

Comms, Cultural, and Narrative Change

Leadership Development

Alliance and Coalitions

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[5] (Un) precedented: Philanthropy Takes Action in the First Year of a New Political Reality, TCC Group, 2017.

FINDING 2:

Philanthropy Support Organizations indicate that foundation members often differ from one another in their understandings of community power building. Many foundations are just beginning to theorize about what power building means and how to apply it to their work. Achieving greater clarity, within foundations and across the sector more broadly, would help strengthen strategic intention.

Elucidating Definitions

"A lot of people are using power building to mean a lot of different things and therefore it can mean everything and nothing at the same time," notes Kristen Cambell, Executive Director of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE).

Cambell's candid appraisal was voiced by nearly every PSO executive we spoke with, in one way or another. At best, lack of clear definitions and shared understanding offer an opening for enhancing learning among foundation staff and board members. At worst, lack of clear and shared definitions constrains institutional appetite for embracing a community power building agenda.

"One thing that makes institutions pull back from exploring community power building is that it is challenging to define and use terminology consistently," notes Funders' Committee for Civic Participation Board Co-Chair Steven Cole-Schwartz, who is also Vice President of Programs at the Group Health Foundation. "The definitional work takes time and is incredibly important. You can't skip it. But equally important is accepting there isn't a perfect definition and it's critical to just get out there and do the work!"

Nascent and relatively amorphous definitions notwithstanding, three definitional categories seem to be emerging. These categorical definitions should not be seen as mutually exclusive, as implicitly or explicitly, foundations often embrace more than one definition.

Building community voice
Many funders (and the PSOs that support them) define their work in terms of ensuring community representation and engagement. Here, community power building equates with a foundation's effort to increase community of color representation on staff and boards, expand avenues for community-funder partnership, strengthen vital community services, and more. As Patricia Smith of The Funders Network notes, "Resident voices are critical…building power means really putting in the work and providing the resources to support their participation. It's not about just inviting community members to the table, but making sure people are coming to the table with the tools and the resources they need to really affect change, and that they are being asked to plan and be a part of the decision-making." Strategies that support building community voice are a critical first step in tackling the structural barriers that systemically undermine sustained health and well-being.

Building a racially just society
Many foundations take community involvement a step further, explicitly linking community involvement efforts to racial justice priorities. This equation is promising in its recognition that marginalized communities must identify and drive equity solutions to secure their own sustained health and well-being. "Racial equity is the grounding through which to talk about civic engagement," argues ABFE's Jones. "I don't understand how to talk about community power building without talking about race. It doesn't matter what the group is; civic engagement impacts can't be extricated from conversations about race."

Building civic infrastructure
A third definitional framework revolves around democratic engagement. Here, the importance of sustained civic action (for any population group) is

seen as paramount. "Power building exists beyond a single election," notes FCCP's Cole-Schwartz.

In these days of increasing polarization, however, some funders are wrestling with how best to define their civic priorities. PACE's Cambell comments, "We've been hearing from our members that even when they have clarity on values and priorities, certain terms can feel loaded and politicized. Saying 'I'm pro-liberty' assumes assignment to an ideological camp, in a similar way that saying 'I stand for justice' assumes another ideological stance. How can we talk inclusively about things as shared and as important as liberty, justice, democracy, and citizenship if everything turns someone off or sends mixed signals?"

Clarifying definitional frames and reaching shared understandings is important (yet time-consuming) work, as Cole-Schwartz notes above. Undoubtedly, institutional priorities and parameters, coupled with various contextual factors in the social, political, and/or geographic landscape, will militate against

reaching a singular definition of "community power building" for the philanthropic sector as a whole. But at the very least, PSO leaders suggest, achieving greater definitional clarity within foundations and their support networks may help to strengthen strategic intentionality and accordingly, to achieving success.

❝ We define power as the ability to make the change you seek in the world. Power building is deeply connected and rooted in leadership development and permanent participation in elections and other institutions. Power building exists beyond a single election. ❞

— Steve Cole-Schwartz, Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

FINDING 3:

Philanthropy Support Organizations recognize common patterns across foundations embracing a community power building frame. Regardless of differences among foundations, effective integration of a power building and equity agenda entails building internal foundation advocates; engaging in intentional and iterative learning; and testing, assessing, and adopting new grantmaking and leadership practices.

Building Internal Foundation Advocates

No matter how big or how small, foundations are typically complex communities, encompassing individuals who bring different personal and professional interests and experiences to the table.

While sharing a commitment to a foundation's guiding mission and values, individuals may nonetheless differently interpret what these "identity markers" mean, and/or hold different knowledge about how to translate principles into effective practice. Foundations that have made the greatest progress are perceived to have pursued the following approaches.

Meet people where they are

"We embrace the idea that everyone is starting from different places," notes Elyse Gordon, Senior Manager of Programs at Philanthropy Northwest. "This avoids blaming that can get in the way." ABFE's Jones notes similarly, "To advance productive conversations, we focus on systems and systemic racism, not on individuals. Racial equity is an eggshell conversation. If you crack the egg of an issue, laying blame and creating divisions, it makes future conversations more difficult the next time. But, don't be afraid of having difficult conversations, either. In our racial equity workshops, we build relationships that enable people to be vulnerable and create an environment of trust."

Tap funder peers

Foundations often enter new terrain with caution. Hearing how and why peer foundations are embracing equity change and new forms of community engagement and power building is "incredibly influential" in motivating others to give it a try. "Our funders are most moved by listening to peer funder stories about effectiveness — or lack of effectiveness — in their grantmaking work historically," notes Philanthropy Northwest's Gordon. Funders for LGBTQ Issues' former President Maulbeck shares in a similar vein, "Welcoming, un-intimidating learning tables among diverse funders are a particularly effective vehicle. They provide a space for funders across a political spectrum to situate themselves and learn from others." Peer-to-peer exchange cultivated through donor collaborative dialogue, regional association learning events, and PSO-hosted forums offer vehicles to test out community power building approaches with a community of peers.

Partner with boards early and often

Many PSOs note that learning is most productive when it engages all levels of personnel across a foundation — including program, leadership, and administrative staff. But engaging board members in learning early, often, and regularly is just as important — and less commonly pursued. Board-facing learning resources are also in short supply, as compared to the plethora of materials that exist for program staff. Foundations that have made the most progress, PSOs observe, often actively engage their board members in learning about equity and its relation to community power.

Engaging in Intentional and Iterative Learning

Adopt a stance of humility

"Everyone is still learning; no one has it down," comments Director of Programs Nichole Hoeflich of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. "Our members note again and again that they are very much on a learning journey. Everyone seems hungry to move in this direction, but no one really feels confident that they've nailed it." Referring to funders who are new in reaching out to community partners, Carly Hare, National Director/Coalition Catalyst of CHANGE Philanthropy, cautions in a like-minded spirit, "Be transparent about where you are. If you are newly learning, be clear so folks don't have false expectations about why you are there."

Use evidence

For many funders, guided consideration of reliable data incentivizes change. "Funders who started by looking at health disparities are now starting to talk about systemic change, and with that, community power," notes Faith Mitchell, former President & CEO of Grantmakers In Health. "Many of our members are making these shifts because they've looked at data from trusted public health experts, or have taken community, statewide, and regional context factors into consideration." Funders for LGBTQ Issues' former President Maulbeck similarly notes, "We lead with the evidence base. There is tons of education work on disparities in health access and impacts for LGBTQ, trans, and people of color queer communities — like data maps and polling data. We also use Kimberly Crenshaw's original case study, which made the case for 'intersectionality,' since it's very specific and grounded. We've found qualitative case studies to be very helpful, too."

Listen to communities

While it should perhaps be seen as a no-brainer, learning directly from marginalized communities is a

new practice for some, while increasingly regarded as essential for both foundations and their PSO networks. "Learning tours for our members at our annual conferences are always our most impactful programs," notes Mitchell. "Getting the board out and meeting with communities is effective" in motivating change.

Consider an array of learning modalities

Appreciating that individuals bring different learning styles and preferences to the table and have varying appetites and capacities for devoting time to learning as well, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) — a PSO explicitly devoted to funder learning — commonly employs multiple and reinforcing learning inputs. GEO's Hoeflich notes, "We almost always begin with a publication to ground conversation. These resources are helpful for grantmaking staff, who typically attend participatory learning forums. Having a print resource puts something in a program officer's hands to bring back to higher ups. Then we follow up publications with participatory learning opportunities — webinars, working groups, and other opportunities for sustained exchange."

Testing, Assessing, and Adopting New Grantmaking and Leadership Practices

Embrace a spectrum of approaches

"We're articulating a continuum of ways foundations can support communities through a new learning resource we're working on now," GEO's Hoeflich explains. "The spectrum we're articulating moves from first informing, to consulting, to collaborating, to actually delegating to communities themselves. We're citing examples of GEO member practice across each of these dimensions. But we're not 'knighting' some approaches over others or assessing a hierarchy of value. We recognize different approaches will work for different members depending on their own context."

Embrace a "both/and" mindset

Effective, long-term systems change requires a broad array of intersecting strategies, from community service, to leadership development, to advocacy, to policy change, to grassroots base-building. Each strategy has distinct value, and foundations will necessarily vary in identifying the particular combination of strategies that make greatest sense for advancing their particular mission.

Strengthen alignment between local and national funders

Simply put, context matters. Both regional associations and issue-based PSOs note that critical insight about people in place is left on the table when national funders insufficiently engage the assets that local funders bring to the table — principally, their deep knowledge of localities, history of relationships and networks, and commitment to supporting in place over time. But national funders bring assets to place-based funders as well — for example, their enhanced capacity and reach, and their knowledge of how strategies tested in one locale have been adapted elsewhere. Better engaging the reciprocal assets of national and place-based funders may strengthen support for building community power over time.

Engage communities in grantmaking decisions

PSOs report that members are increasingly considering strategies like participatory grantmaking to begin shifting power in decision-making from foundation staff to the communities most affected by the issues funders support. Participatory grantmaking provides funders and support groups alike an opportunity to collaborate and strengthen larger movements. Participatory roles may include jointly setting grantmaking priorities, developing an RFP, engaging in vetting and due diligence, participating on a grant decision panel, structuring grant reporting, and more. While powerful, this emerging practice also raises challenges, such as the fact that it is a resource-intensive endeavor for communities and foundations alike.[6]

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[6] "Deciding Together: Shifting power and resources through participatory grantmaking," Foundation Center. 2018.

FINDING 4:

Philanthropy Support Organizations recognize numerous obstacles to advancing community power building work. These factors appear common across foundation type, geography, issues, and constituency priorities. Tackling them successfully may require subtle or significant shifts in a foundation's practices, policies, learning culture, and public stance.

Defining Community

Many foundations have questions about how best to identify, learn from, partner with, and resource community constituents that represent "authentic community voice." Identifying the right community partners takes deep understanding of place — context knowledge that may be challenging for national funders to acquire, and that oftentimes eludes even local and regional funders whose grantee relationships and community networks may privilege some constituencies over others.

Funders may begin to acquire essential understandings of marginalized communities in a given locale through partnership with local funder tables, donor collaboratives, community foundations, and/or regional associations. These trusted vehicles for funder learning and networking often serve as a springboard through which foundations may begin to develop their own direct relationships with community actors.

Balancing foundation and community interests

Responsiveness to community priorities is all well and good, funders increasingly appreciate, but how can this commitment go hand-in-hand with accountability to a foundation's guiding commitments, authority, and customary locus of control? Supporting grassroots organizing groups — while essential and powerful — raises particular challenges for some funders, as base-building groups commonly embrace an adaptive, multi-issue agenda which often exceeds the more tightly bounded issue focus foundations themselves may choose to pursue.

Here the adoption of an equity lens has been helpful, since analysis of structural barriers recognizes the imperative of addressing an array of intersecting social and economic determinants that impact marginalized communities. For many funders, intentional work across portfolio "silos" is a first step in building community power. Carly Hare, National Director/Coalition Catalyst of CHANGE Philanthropy, puts it this way, "When communities and funders work together to define the tenets and systems that support communities best, it begins to change foundation practice."

Assessing change

Building community power is a long-term game. How could it not be so, given the seemingly intractable structural challenges that have obstructed justice for so many for so long? As FCCP's Cole-Schwartz notes, "The arc of what we are talking about — building community power — is a decade or a generation of change. Funders need to have a long-term sense of what it will take to be successful."

In this context, foundations and their PSO communities wrestle with a bundle of important questions. These include: what are meaningful indicators of change that foundations might hope to identify, monitor, and demonstrate through their supported work? How can impact be attributed to a small number of supported groups, given the priorities of alliance and movement building to realize complex change goals? What is the relationship between local, state, and federal policy change, and what scale of change should funders be supporting to realize sustainable transformation? Finally, how can long-term change be assessed within funders' customary short-term grant cycles?

While complex, these important questions should not be construed as insurmountable challenges.

Indeed, over many years, tested and credible assessment approaches have been developed to guide both foundations and their grantees in assessing gains made; applying lessons about successes and challenges to improving practice; and building capacity among both funders and community groups to integrate community power building assessment into this important work.

Considering institutional practices

Foundations have a legitimate need to monitor resources disbursed to the field, and commonly require proposal, monitoring, and reporting requirements of their grantees to ensure accountability for resources under management. The most marginalized communities — and the base-building groups that often support them — are however chronically under-resourced. Capacity to successfully complete a foundation's routine requirements may be challenging for even well-resourced organizations. For organizations with more constrained capacity, these requirements are especially confounding, and program staff committed to resourcing power building work may feel caught between meeting institutional priorities and meeting needs of the groups they seek to support.

These challenges may require new forms of alignment between program and operational staff, requiring foundations to take a candid look at institutional practices that may inadvertently impede supporting the very groups foundations need to support to achieve the change they desire. They may also require foundations to shift their customary grantmaking approaches. "Fund like you want to win," urges NFG's former President Quirin. "If you wanted to support an organization that just had to be successful, no matter what, you would find out what they needed and simply make it happen. Maybe it would be a 10-year grant, or maybe you would bundle 10 years into one grant, or maybe you would buy them a building and they would get funding from collecting five years' worth of rent. Funders need to identify what these groups need to be successful, and then support them to really *be* successful."

Changing mindsets

Reflecting societal norms and longstanding hierarchies, many foundations are accustomed to believing that power resides in recognized "authorities" high up on the food chain — government officials, leaders of social and educational institutions, business leaders, and so on. Appreciating that marginalized communities themselves bring power essential to achieving lasting change entails a new way of thinking and theorizing, as well as greater openness to risk, testing, and experimentation.

Sustained and careful learning within a foundation — welcomed and championed by foundation leadership, and amplified and furthered by collaboration with Philanthropy Support Organizations and other peer networks — is an important way to get started on this important work.

Foundations of varying size, reach, and issue priority are grappling with common questions relevant to building community power:

- What is the relationship between strengthening communities and achieving sustainable change?

- How can we more effectively support the priorities of vulnerable populations?

- How do we decide among whose voice to listen to and which communities to engage in our work?

- How do we negotiate foundation and community control in pursuing respective priorities and interests?

- What is our own foundation's appropriate leadership voice?

- How can we assess our impact in building community power, and how long will it take to see results?

- What new partnerships do we need to build to support power building?

- Can we advance a power building agenda while avoiding ideological polarization?

- How do we build internal institutional commitment to power building priorities?

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

1. Foundations are increasingly embracing community power building.

Our inquiry revealed that foundations increasingly see advancing equity as essential to achieving foundation mission and impact. This awareness holds true across foundations that differ widely from one another in size, reach, scale, geography, and issue and/or constituency focus. Accordingly, many are striving to develop more robust relationships with marginalized communities, alternately exploring new communication, engagement, and grantmaking processes to solidify community-foundation partnerships. Within this context, foundations increasingly seek to learn about, define, and effectively resource community power building. This approach is recognized as one lever among many within a strategic ecosystem. Determining how a power building lens complements other pursued strategies remains a work in progress.

2. Philanthropy Support Organizations play a vital role.

A primary role of Philanthropy Support Organizations is to provide opportunities for funders to learn from their peers — the single most trusted source of practice knowledge for grantmakers.[7] Not surprisingly, then, PSOs interviewed for this inquiry are serving as a go-to source for funder learning, convening, and coordinated action. As a collective body, PSOs have produced a treasure trove of resources, tools, and trainings to support foundations in adopting an equity and community power building approach. As intentionally designed "big tents," they are uniquely positioned to spot sector trends, identify common challenges, and facilitate effective approaches to guide individual foundations and their collaborating peer communities to advance field and movement change.

3. A robust resource body exists, though it typically addresses select dimensions of the community power building enterprise.

A rich plethora of how-to guides, trainings, issue briefs, case studies, and academic literature exists on numerous elements commonly perceived to constitute the community power building endeavor. Since foundations understand and define community power building in different ways, however, funders often use different terms to describe this work, and focus on select components of the power building endeavor. For these reasons, a Google search of "community power building" yields only a fraction of the resources available for funders to turn to as they strive to advance a community power building agenda.

For example, field resources reviewed for this report encompassed materials on how to effectively resource a wealth of civic engagement practices — spanning voter education and mobilization, integrated voter engagement, lobbying, balloting and more. Reviewed materials also embraced how to effectively support communities — spanning more "traditional" community development, leadership, and engagement approaches, as well as grassroots, base-building practices that are relevant across local, regional, and national settings. A final, growing body of resources addressed practices, exemplars, opportunities, and challenges funders typically confront in their work to advance racial equity and justice.

Taken together, this rich panoply of materials — extensively yet inevitably, only partially captured in the appendices that follow — is a sturdy base on which to build funder learning.

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[7] Harder+Co Community Research and Edge Research, Peer to Peer: At the Heart of Influencing More Effective Philanthropy: A Field Scan of How Foundations Use and Access Knowledge, prepared for the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, February 2017, available at https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hewlett-Field-Scan-Report.pdf.

4. Continued resource development, coupled with sustained learning opportunities, would be of great value.

The abundance of existing resources notwithstanding, gaps remain. Additional tools would arguably help foundations and their peer communities more effectively apply a community power building lens to their grantmaking work. As a place to begin, new materials might productively address the following concerns.

Definitions

Identified challenge: Defining community power building remains elusive.

Potential response: A resource that provides a coherent definition of community power building (or perhaps a menu of definitions used by different institutions, along with their guiding rationales) could enhance strategic intentionality within foundations and/or among funder communities.

Theory of Change

Identified challenge: Pursued approaches must complement and leverage each other to be maximally effective.

Potential response: A guide that articulates a theory of change that embraces multiple strategies and the continuum of approaches to support and build equity change could help articulate the strategic ecosystem in which power building resides. This approach would resonate with the movement building field literature often reviewed by foundations and nonprofits.

Peer case studies

Identified challenge: Funders are known to privilege learning from each other over other differently valuable sources.

Potential response: Illustrative examples of foundations working across a range of community power building approaches, showcasing the operational mechanisms funders employ to cultivate and sustain genuine partnerships, the challenges they are facing in doing so, and their attempts to resolve them, might helpfully incentivize similar experimentation among funder peers.

Board

Identified challenge: Board learning is very partially addressed.

Potential response: Materials specifically geared toward building understanding among foundation trustees would fill an identified resource gap. Most helpful materials might address questions board members are likely to raise — such as how to safeguard institutional point-of-view, ensure the legality of supported work, and meaningfully assess progress.

Directory

Identified challenge: It's not easy to locate the wealth of resources that speak to advancing community power building work.

Potential response: An annotated inventory and/or dynamic database of materials and sources would help make sure that available goods are put to use rather than remaining on a real or virtual "shelf," insufficiently informing field practice.

5. Moving forward requires dedicated commitment and enhanced capacity.

At the end of the day, written materials can only take a foundation so far. The rich array of peer-to-peer forums that funders tap across the philanthropic sector — so often designed and facilitated by issue-, constituency-, and regionally-based PSOs — are essential to funder learning, experimentation, and action. But both foundations and the PSOs that support them need greater capacity to advance a comprehensive and integrated community power building agenda. Ongoing work with PSOs as well as marginalized communities may help to ensure that foundations embed learning into their institutional practice. This important commitment requires building the capacities of marginalized communities first and foremost, but also building the capacity of the philanthropic sector's infrastructure — most immediately here, PSOs themselves — to robustly support their foundation members in making institutional change.

APPENDICES

Appendix I:
PSO Interviewee and Interview Guide

NAME	ROLE	PSO AFFILIATION
Susie Brown	President	Minnesota Council on Foundations
Kristen Cambell	Executive Director	Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement
Celine Coggins	Executive Director	Grantmakers for Education
Elyse Gordon	Senior Manager, Programs	Philanthropy Northwest
Kristina Gray-Akpa	Former Program Director	Grantmakers In Health
Carly Hare	National Director/Coalition Catalyst	CHANGE Philanthropy
Nichole Hoeflich	Director of Programs	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
Edward Jones	Vice President of Programs	Association of Black Foundation Executives
Janine Lee	President & CEO	Southeastern Council of Foundations
Rachel Leon	Executive Director	Environmental Grantmakers Association
Ben Maulbeck	Former President	Funders for LGBTQ Issues
Faith Mitchell	Former President & CEO	Grantmakers In Health
Daranee Petsod	President	Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees
Dennis Quirin	Former President	Neighborhood Funders Group
Steven Cole-Schwartz	Board Co-Chair	Funders' Committee for Civic Participation
Patricia Smith	President & CEO	The Funders Network
Edgar Villanueva	Board Chair	Native Americans in Philanthropy

PSO Interview Guide

Theme I: Resonance and relevance

1. I want to start by getting some insight into whether and how your organization and its members consider community power building important to your PSO. For our conversation today, please appreciate that we're using the language of "community power building" broadly to encompass strategies such as grassroots organizing, voter engagement, leadership development, and more. With this leeway in mind,

2. Does **[insert PSO name]** have a working definition of power in your work?

3. Does **[insert PSO name]** overall see community power building as a significant driver for your PSO? Ex. Is there a theory of change or values statement that explicitly embraces this perspective?

   a. If yes: Is there any brief backstory that is useful to know about how the network came to embrace this perspective?

   b. If no: Are specific foundation members embracing this perspective — and if so, do they share any particular characteristics worth noting?

Theme II: Programming and resources

4. To prepare for this interview, we reviewed publicly available resource materials on your website and found numerous resources relevant to strategies supporting community voice and community power building. Are we correct in interpreting these materials in this way? Would you also frame them as addressing issues of concern to community power building?

5. Can you tell us more about the process for their development?

   a. What was the impetus for creating the program/resource?

   b. What problem were you trying to address?

   c. What do you know about which of your members are using this resource and for what reasons/to what end? Specific examples?

   d. What do you know about how helpful or not the resources have been? Any specific examples?

   e. Are there any ways additional and/or differently shaped learning vehicles might have enhanced funder member learning?

6. Understanding the PSOs make decisions about how much staff time to allocate to different strategies through your programming, research, and publications, what influences you the most when making these determinations? Is there anything that would specifically encourage your PSO to feature topics related to community power building more prominently? What are potential obstacles?

7. Are there any other forms of data, metric, or analytics (qualitative or quantitative) that your organization or funder members solicit to learn about public or community perspectives on the issues you advance? Or to learn about how community power advance equity? Who are the trusted voices with your members, which may be discerned from whose information is regularly shared with members, who is invited to speak on programs, and who the organization uses when commissioning data or research directly?

Theme III: Obstacles and opportunities

8. We're aware that foundations often face obstacles in supporting community power building. We're interested in lessons learned from your own funder members that might usefully inform how foundations can begin to engage in this arena. Do any of your members strike you as particularly committed to and effective in supporting community power building? What's effective about their work, in your perspective?

9. Are you aware of any members who have considered, or have begun to support, a community power building strategy, but ended up pulling away from it? What happened?

10. Based on what you've seen among your members, if a foundation is new to engaging in this arena, is there a best place to begin? Are there any low-hanging fruit, for example?

11. Given the diversity of your membership, do you have thoughts about how national funders, who may not have a place-based strategies or perhaps local allies, can best learn about and enter into effective support of community based efforts?

Appendix II:
Key Literature Reviewed

INSTITUTION AND/OR AUTHOR	RESOURCE
Grassroots Solution	How Funders View and Apply Power to Their Work
Grassroots Policy Project; Healey, Richard	Organizing for Governing Power
Labaton, Vivien	Why Movements Matter
McLeod Grant, Heather	Pioneers in Justice: Building Networks and Movements for Social Change
Nakashian, Mary	RWJF Investments in Building Community Power: A Baseline Analysis
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP); Ranghelli, Lisa; Choi, Jennifer; and Petegorsky, Dan	Power Moves: Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice
National Rural Funders Collaborative; Richardson, Jim "JR"; Dangler, David R.	Investments in Rural America: Where are the Foundations?
Peters, Adele	Power is the Ability to Change the Rules- How Rashad Robinson holds companies accountable
USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE); Pastor, Manuel; and Ortiz, Rhoda	Making Change- How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them
USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE); Pastor, Manuel; Ito, Jennifer; and Perez, Anthony	There's Something Happening Here… A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative
USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE); Pastor, Manuel; Ito, Jennifer; and Rosner, Rachel	Transactions Transformations Translations: Metrics that Matter for Building, Scaling, and Funding Social Movements
USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE); Pastor, Manuel; Ito, Jennifer; Wander, Madeline	Changing States: A Framework for Progressive Governance

Appendix III:
Selected Resources and Tools

In addition to the key literature identified above, TCC Group surveyed publicly available materials from 26 Philanthropy Serving Organizations (PSOs). Our desk research identified 124 events, publications, blog posts, and other materials between the January 2017 December 2019 period. Select resources below may be particularly useful for readers of this report.

ORGANIZATION	TITLE	FORMAT
Candid	Foundation Funding for U.S. Democracy Tool	Factsheet/Infographic
Funders for a Just Economy (FJE)	Journey Towards Intersectional Grant-Making	Report
Funders for a Just Economy (FJE)	Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining safety and security in our community	Report
Funders for LGBTQ Issues	Racial Equity Online Toolkit	Toolkit
Funders for Reproductive Equity (FRE)	Authentic and Equitable Partnerships: A framework for building movements	Report
Funders for Reproductive Equity (FRE)	Grantmaking Assessment Tool for Women of Color Leadership	Toolkit/Guide
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)	FCCP's Power Impact Team: Recommendations for how funders can help communities build power	Factsheet/Infographic
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)	Defining Civic Engagement	Factsheet/Infographic
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)	Integrated Voter Engagement A Proven Model to Increase Civic Engagement	Factsheet/Infographic
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)/Ford Foundation	A Program Review of the Promoting Electoral Reform and Democratic Participation (PERDP) Initiative	Report
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)	Field Guide for Philanthropy and Civic Action	Toolkit/Guide
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)	Awake to Woke to Work: Building a race equity culture	Toolkit/Guide
Grantmakers in Health (GIH)	Philanthropy's Role in Addressing Neighborhood Conditions That Shape Health	Report

Grantmakers in Health (GIH)	It is Time to Place an Explicit Focus on Agency	Article/Blog Post
Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN)	Beyond Equity, Toward Liberation	Article/Blog Post
Justice Funders	Resonance: A Framework for Social Justice Philanthropy	Toolkit/Guide
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)	Power Moves	Toolkit/Guide
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)	How to think about power (especially if you have some)	Article/Blog Post
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)	Philanthropy: Perilous times call for bold measures	Article/Blog Post
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)	Helping Grantmakers on the path of Civic Engagement Funding	Article/Blog Post
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)/Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)	Power in Philanthropy	Article/Blog Post (Series)
Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP)	Strong Heart and Minds Centering Indigenous Women and Girls in Movement Building	Report
Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG)	All the People, All the Places: A Landscape of Opportunity for Rural and Small-Town Civic Engagement	Report
Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG)	Voices From the Field: Rural organizers on what they need from funders	Report
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE)	What is Democracy? Primer	Factsheet/Infographic
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE)	What is Civic Engagement? Primer	Factsheet/Infographic
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE)	How Can Philanthropy Improve Civic Learning? Primer	Factsheet/Infographic
Philanthropy Southwest	The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy: Lessons from the intersection of government and community	Report

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